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"CHRISTMAS CARD FROM BRITAIN"

Speakers:

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

KENNETH HORNE

PROFESSOR DENIS BROGAN

Moderator:

YALE NEWMAN



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"CHRISTMAS CARD FROM BRITAIN"

MR. NEWMAN: For anyone living in Britain tonight, whether he finds himself in London, Cardiff, Manchester or even Bigglesway, he is conscious of one overwhelming fact -- Christmas is but seven days hence. Here, near our studios in the West End of London, streets and shop windows have undergone their annual metamorphosis. From Model Arch, down along Oxford Street and Regent Street to Picadilly Circus, there is a festive mood as young and old alike stop to admire the gay decorations and enticing window displays. Even the organ grinders and sidewalk entertainers in Leicester Square proclaim the season's mood. They have switched over from the standard Cockney tunes to traditional Christmas Carols.

So that you, back home, may share more closely the varied aspects of the British season, TOWN MEETING tonight is happy to send you a "Christmas Card from Britain," containing the lighter, as well as the more traditional side of the season, as observed here. By sending this card in sound, we hope to convey a kaleidoscope of images which tend to form the backdrop for Christmas celebrations here.

In the studio with me are three prominent British figures, who have generously offered to help me with this task. Our first guest is Malcolm Muggeridge, the globe-trotting editor of the English humor magazine, "Punch." Mr. Muggeridge is no stranger in America, having been the Washington correspondent for the "London Daily Telegraph" in 1946 and 1947. Mr. Muggeridge, can you tell us what most distinguishes the British Christmas, as far as you are concerned?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Well, of course, at 52, with my children all grown up, Christmas is quite a different proposition from what it was when they were little. Then it was all for them. There had to be presents for everyone, a turkey, all sorts of luxuries, paper chains, holly, mistletoe -- with a rather sad aftermath of bills to be paid, indigestion to be overcome and clearing up to be done. There was usually also a pantomime, though not "Peter Pan," a play in regard to which my children, I am happy to say, share my own deep distaste.

Our Yule Log might not have been particularly massive, but we had one. Our united voices might not have been particularly melodious, but we managed "Noel" and "Good King Wenceslaus" with the aid of a somewhat primitive piano accompaniment. It was all very delightful at the time and, in retrospect, seems infinitely so.

Nowadays, the occasion is more sedate. Christmas cards from a great variety of people instead of a Christmas Tree. And a plump capon instead of a turkey. All the same the church bells as they ring out still signify a momentary pause in the pursuit of gain or power to which so disproportionate an amount of the other 364 days of the year is devoted to. Neither commercialization nor sentimentalization has served quite to destroy the true spirit of Christmas, though it must be admitted they clog and impede it a bit.

In recent years, I've acquired the habit of going to St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle for the Christmas Eve Carol Service. Nothing could be more enchanting. The candlelight which makes the chapel seem full of shadows as it is of history and the clear, pure boys' voices singing carols. Some of this goes back to the very beginnings of our civilization and to the Christian religion from which it is derived. It provides a good preliminary anyway to the legitimate festivities which follow.

MR. NEWMAN: Thank you, Mr. Muggeridge. Our next guest is another person who feels at home in America and knows it intimately, Professor Denis W. Brogan, Professor of Political Science at Cambridge University. Professor Brogan has recently returned from a visit to the United States where he was introduced to TOWN MEETING listeners as the one who can explain British politics to Americans in terms of baseball, and American history to the English in terms of cricket. Professor Brogan, perhaps you can add to this list by telling us your interpretation of the British Christmas.

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PROF. BROGAN: I think you've got to distinguish between Christmas, as a I remember it as a child, when I was at the receiving end. My memories of Christmas are entirely gratifying. I got things for nothing. Nowadays -- my children not quite as old as Malcolm Muggeridge's -- I am still on the giving end. Christmas is an ordeal. I've got to think of things to get them -- I've got later to pay for them -- and I've got to get through the, from an elderly gentleman's point of view, laborious job of being merry on Christmas Day. The endless food and drink with no troubles of digestion, with no trouble of choice -- you ate everything and drank everything -- have to be replaced nowadays with a regime of vigilance in both. That is a change for the worse.

I grew up in Scotland where Christmas was not, in my town, a holiday at all and I don't think it's a legal holiday to this day. Catholics and Episcopalians celebrated Christmas -- Presbyterians didn't. One important consequence of that was that all the public houses were open on Christmas Day so many good Presbyterians did, in fact, celebrate Christmas in a sense. But the great winter holiday in Scotland was and is, as it is in France, New Year's Day. There were many people, as I said, who had such a Christmas feeling that they were able to celebrate both Christmas and a week later New Year's Day -- and sometimes the whole six days in between -- but then the Scots are notoriously hearty. A good deal of the ritual overlapped and it was impossible to distinguish very clearly, over a certain age, which festival was being celebrated at what particular moment.

In England, where I have lived the last 30 years or more, Christmas is undoubtedly the great national winter holiday. There is no competition and my modern associations with Christmas that are not associations with Christmas elsewhere are associations with the way the English celebrate Christmas, and mainly associations with celebrating the birth. I don't think -- I don't quite agree, at any rate -- that religion has totally disappeared from Christmas but certainly a great change is being made -- jazzing up of Christmas into a great secular holiday. The Christmas element is still preserved, for example, by the BBC, but it is also competed with in a great many ways. Christmas sport, cinema is one side of that secularization which is only badly compensated for by the disappearance of Christmas newspapers. In the old days you could have newspapers on Christmas Day, now you can't. And, of course, we all think the weather has changed. There are no longer any white Christmases -- it's all changed for a milder non-Christmas flavor. This happens to be true, I am told, meteorologically it is true. Christmases are milder, softer, more gentle than they were. Of course, in childhood memory, there always were white Christmases -- now there are not.

I think one distinction about the Christmas in England which has got to be noted is either home life or bogus home life. That is to say, people either celebrate Christmas at home or they celebrate it at a hotel which guarantees all the charms of home without the bother. You get the homelike atmosphere of a Christmas best of all in an English hotel at Christmas and when my children are old enough to relieve me of my financial burdens, I shall celebrate Christmas, if at all, at one of the cozy family hotel Christmases which are now laid on.

But the one great loss -- in the old days in Scotland, anyway -- are the Christmas pantomines which provided the songs for the whole year. You learned the songs at Christmas, they lasted you the whole year -- you didn't need to listen in to the BBC or go to movies or other alternative unnamed forms of entertainment to learn what you had to sing for a year. All songs were launched at Christmas in pantomines and that did you until next Christmas. I can remember far better the Christmas pantomine songs of 1906 than I can remember the hit parade songs of last year, and since I am very fond of singing I think that is a great loss.

MR. NEWMAN: Thank you, Professor Brogan. Our third speaker tonight, Kenneth Horne, may not be so well known in America as our other two guests, but he is certainly a household name in this country, being a panel member of Britain's most popular TV parlor game, "What's My Line?" Mr. Horne, besides doubling in brass as a variety personality and author of numerous articles, is a prominent figure in the financial world

here as the director of a large glass corporation. Mr. Horne, can you tell us what you most associate with spending Christmas in Britain?

MR. HORNE: Yes, I certainly can because whenever I am asked, "What do you associate most with spending Christmas here in Britain?" I have no doubt at all about the answer because I happen to be the youngest of a family of seven and it so happens, incidentally, that my father was a Congregational minister and he was very keen on the family spirit with a family of, shall we say to be polite, ages from 50 to 65, and so ever since we've been very young, we've tried each year to have a family Christmas with a Christmas at home. That's what I like about Christmas. However far apart we may be during the rest of the year and however seldom we may meet at other times, we do like to be one family at Christmas. I think that probably goes for thousands of other families all over Britain, all over England anyhow, with due respect to Professor Brogan. When I say "at home" incidentally, I mean just that. I don't really agree with Professor Brogan's remark about the hotel Christmas, although they put them on extremely well over here. When I say "at home" I mean in the house of one of us and not really out in a hotel or a restaurant. And that's the Christmas spirit that I like and that's the sort of Christmas party which is well worthwhile.

Another thing I like about Christmas is something that happened to me very, very recently indeed. I went to open a Christmas Fayre -- Ye Olde Christmas Fayre -- down in Limehouse in the East End of London. And there all the kids get together and they have a sort of bazaar in a neighborhood church and it's an early Christmas for them -- one that sort of starts the Christmas spirit going and it's a lot of fun.

I must say I don't entirely agree either with the remark that our host made earlier about the organ grinders in Leicester Square. It's a nice thing to think that they do change over about this time of year to carols and "Good King Wenceslaus" but when I was in Leicester Square this morning, they were still being a little bit Americanized and the tune I heard from the organ grinder was something like "Slap Me Sister with a Strawberry Flan."

MR. NEWMAN: Thank you, Kenneth Horne. I see that our opening statements have brought a bit of controversy and I know Malcolm Muggeridge has his eye on Professor Brogan.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: There are two points I really want to make. First of all, I had never thought of Denis Brogan as a songster. I've thought of him in many roles, but as a songster I've never thought of him, and I wonder if he would sing one of these pantomine songs that he is talking about.

MR. NEWMAN: Professor Brogan, do you think you can oblige?

PROF. BROGAN: You have asked for it. I heard this song in 1906
(acappella rendition)

Come little girl have a sail with me
Up in my bonny balloon.
Come little girl have a sail with me
Round and round the moon.
No one to see us behind the clouds
Oh, what a place to spoon.
Up in the sky, ever so high
Sailing in my balloon.

MR. HORNE: That's marvelous!

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Isn't that wonderful. It is obvious that Denis, if he hadn't taken to academic studies, would have been a great operatic singer.

MR. HORNE: May I say that I would still rather look on him as a professor.

PROF. BROGAN: Jealousy.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Pure jealousy. And then I wanted to ask Kenneth Horne -- what was he doing in Leicester Square early this morning?

MR. NEWMAN: Mr. Horne, can you explain that one?

MR. HORNE: I'm not going to try to explain that. It might be too embarrassing. Anyhow, we haven't got an asbestos microphone this evening. I want to ask Malcolm Muggeridge two things. First of all, why not "Peter Pan," and secondly, why not a

turkey? Why can't you afford a turkey these days? Why a capon?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: As the politicians say, let's answer the questions in order. First of all, with regard to "Peter Pan," I do regard it as a singularly loathesome play.

PROF. BROGAN: Hear, hear!

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I think it's got a sort of sentimentality about it that is extremely distasteful. I mean those things like, you know, every time she smiles a fairy is born or something. It's not very nice. With regard to the second question of a capon, it's merely that with my reduced family circle, a turkey which, as you know, contains a large amount of edible matter, is too big and, therefore, one buys a capon strictly from the point of its size, a more suitable item.

MR. HORNE: And I say it's still very nice to have a turkey because you do associate it particularly with Christmas and, after all, cold turkey afterward -- which is what I was coming to really, is a very delectable dish. You ought to try one, Malcolm. I'll buy you one.

MR. NEWMAN: Gentlemen, if I can get back to the central theme of our program, "Christmas Card from Britain," I'd like to bring this question to your attention. The official magazine of the British Tourist Office, "Coming Events in Britain," this month says in its leading article that Christmas doesn't change from century to century -- neither does it change from country to country. Do you all agree with this, or is there something special you here in Britain have to offer visitors from other countries?

PROF. BROGAN: Well, it's all nonsense. Some countries don't celebrate Christmas at all, it's only celebrated as a secondary holiday in Scotland and, in any case, the special kind of English Christmas that we celebrate today is a quite modern thing -- a lot of the things we associate with it -- turkeys must be because they're North American birds which we haven't got -- Father Christmas is a German importation that came in with the Prince Consort about 1840 -- the most popular Christmas Carol, "White Christmas," is an American importation and quite obviously it can't be true. Christmas has changed a great deal. I suggested some reasons or some ways it has changed but the great rise of Christmas as a family festival -- the type Mr. Horne was talking about -- as much as anything else was due to Dickens. Dickens popularized the idea of Christmas, not as a religious festival but as a family semi-secular festival. And I should imagine that the modern Christmas we celebrate doesn't go back but to 1850 -- the middle of Queen Victoria's reign anyway.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I would agree absolutely with Denis Brogan. I think that Christmas has changed completely from being a purely religious festival which celebrated the birth of Christ to becoming a sort of mild, harmless Saturnalia and that, of course, came in from Germany with the Prince Consort. The Christmas Tree had never been heard of -- Santa Claus had never been heard of -- none of those things had ever been heard of until the 19th Century.

PROF. BROGAN: The goose was the great thing, not turkey, from an edible point of view.

MR. NEWMAN: Kenneth Horne, I noticed you scribbling some notes there. Do you agree or disagree with the article?

MR. HORNE: No, I think Christmas has changed tremendously, even in my time. Malcolm was saying really that Christmas has changed from a holy day, as it was really meant to be, to a holiday in a very, very different sense altogether. Professor Brogan was talking about Dickens and it's just a matter of interest -- again I said I'd been to this Fayre this afternoon. I went, a couple of days ago, to a very old English Club called the Pickwick Bicycle Club. They celebrate Christmas in a marvelous way in this country, they have a wonderful party. And the interesting part to me was that they have as an associate the Boston Bicycle Club who, I believe, carry out the same sort of celebrations over there at the same time. But, of course, Christmas has changed and as far as I am concerned, the great thing, of course, that was altered is the disappearance, to a great extent, of the home Christmas with the innovation of these awful things like microphones, radio and television, and people rely much to much on that to celebrate their Christmas.

MR. NEWMAN: May I get back to the second part of my question -- is there anything particular that Britain has to offer at this season.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I think it is a time when, in general, visitors quite prudently and rightly keep away from England because it is a time when everybody is absolutely with their families and when all kinds of public entertainment are at a minimum. Of course, one doesn't look for truth in tourist literature, but the idea that Christmas is the same everywhere is complete nonsense.

PROF. BROGAN: And the only public entertainment we have -- the pantomime -- is very English, indeed, and doesn't entertain anyone who wasn't brought up to it.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Except that now it's all on ice, isn't it?

PROF. BROGAN: Oh, I believe there are a few -- I don't think "Sinbad the Sailor" is on ice yet, but it will come. There are a few non-ice pantomimes, I believe.

MR. NEWMAN: Is there anything that you can think of that you would say, "This is English," and "This is German," or "This is American," in referring to Christmas celebrations here?

MR. HORNE: I think we've really said them all. I don't know enough about the history of Christmas to say what else is English, with the possible exception of pantomime which I suppose is essentially the British or English, isn't it, Professor Brogan?

PROF. BROGAN: Oh, it's English.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: The fascinating thing is, how this idea of Christmas -- this German idea of Christmas has really become accepted almost everywhere.. I spent a Christmas once in Moscow and even now -- in those days they didn't call him Father Christmas which might have seemed a slight deviation, might have got them into trouble -- they called him Father Frost, but it was exactly the same idea. It was the idea of an old chap of benevolent, rather red-faced old man with whiskers, coming down and distributing presents.

MR. HORNE: And how did that benevolent, red-faced old gentleman with whiskers come into being? Why did he take that particular shape?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: He was St. Nicholas, wasn't he?

PROF. BROGAN: Yes, it was St. Nicholas you see, whose festival is December 6, in fact, not the 25th. In Holland he is still December 6, and he has been moved by us to Christmas Day. What the English Christmas is, is a sort of holding company of every conceivable thing associated with the winter festival. And what they do in Scotland for New Year's, etc., is all concentrated around Christmas, which many people now think is called Xmas. A great many people don't realize it is a contraction, but believe that Xmas is the name of this festival.

MR. NEWMAN: Professor Brogan, a short while ago you were talking about English literature and its impact on Christmas celebrations. I am wondering, what effect would you say people like Dickens have had on Christmas celebrations throughout the world?

PROF. BROGAN: Dickens had this immediate result in England, that he enabled people whose religious background was hostile to Christmas, to celebrate it. The Puritans were against Christmas. The Pickwick Bicycle Club in Boston, by celebrating Christmas, was working against the spirit of Boston, Massachusetts. Dickens, by making it a quasi-secular festival, by taking it out of the church calendar, enabled people who wanted a winter holiday to take it over without betraying their religious principles. And that had an effect in America because Dickens was very popular there -- the American Christmas is partly borrowed from Dickens and then it comes back to us from America. I think there is no doubt that the single greatest maker of the modern Christmas, this secular festival that Malcolm has been talking about, is Dickens. And you can see it in other countries -- you can see it in Paris now, which is an immense change. I don't know anybody but Dickens who has had that creative effect on Christmas. The Prince Consort brought in the Christmas Tree and Father Christmas, but the celebration itself, the idea that we must do something at Christmas for the family, etc., is a Dickensian gift to England, then to America and then back from America to Scotland, etc.

MR. NEWMAN: That's rather interesting. Malcolm Muggeridge, do you agree?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I think Denis is undoubtedly right that Dickens had an enormous effect on it. Of course, I would introduce a slightly sour note here and say this -- that one of the things that Dickens did was to convince rich men, who had been up to all sorts of tricks during the year, that if they were to engage in a little rather sort of romantic charity on Christmas Day, it somehow cancelled out everything else they had been doing. And I think that was part of his enormous popularity, that he was very reassuring to people who felt very guilty about the 364 days, and then on the 365th day, they distribute a little bit of largesse and turkeys and things, and everybody would glow with good humor and that somehow seemed to settle the account. I think that was a slightly phony proposition.

MR. NEWMAN: Kenneth Horne, as the entrepreneur among us, how do you feel about this?

MR. HORNE: I don't know what "entrepreneur" means at all. I think it's French and I hope it's rude. I couldn't possibly add to those two statements really, except for the fact to compliment Malcolm on that wonderful phrase, "romantic charity," which is so true. I'm not a Dickensian, so to speak, and no particular lover of Scrooge, either, as far as that goes. And really, what Dickens has done for me is given me this very lovely party in the last few days, of which I spoke earlier.

MR. NEWMAN: Since we're living in the atomic age, perhaps we can talk a little bit about that. Do any of you have any reason to believe that Christmases of the future may change gradually, as our daily lives seem to be doing now?

PROF. BROGAN: Well, if by atomic age you use the whole question, the whole immense scientific change, there is a chance of celebrating Christmas somewhere not at home -- on Mars, let us say. It would be very interesting to go to Mars in a saucer and see what kind of Christmas they have. And you could, therefore, avoid some of the preparations for Christmas -- I'm going to Paris to avoid them. I'll come back just on Christmas Eve and leave my wife to prepare, but it would sound better if I could say I was going to Mars or to Mercury. And I think it would be a wonderful thing if the children could be shot off to a fairly remote planet and told to say there until they can come down again.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I'd just like to ask Kenneth one simple question. Do you really believe that Denis is coming back from Paris on Christmas Eve?

MR. HORNE: I should very much doubt it.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I have the gravest doubts. About this question of the atomic effect on Christmas, of course, there are various things. If it blows up the planet, that would clearly destroy any possibility of celebrating subsequent Christmases. The other thing is, of course, that if, as suggested, it completely alters the climate so that we have, in fact, sort of sunny weather, that would require considerable readjustment of our Christmas ceremonies. I believe myself, you know, that actually what would happen would be that somehow this desire that human beings have got, which I personally applaud, sort of once a year throwing their hat over the windmill and just being a little bit -- letting their hair down -- that that would, in fact, survive. And whatever might happen to the world, you would find these festivals which in fact have survived a very large number of religions and phases of civilization are likely to go on. Unless the atomic age succeeds in blowing the world to smithereens, some variant of this ceremony is likely to persist.

MR. NEWMAN: Kenneth Horne, how do you feel?

MR. HORNE: Well, I'm going to Mars this year -- and next year my mother is coming to me. I don't know, really. Of course, one thing this atomic age does is to make this question of Christmas presents a good deal easier for our nephews and nieces, or nephews in particular. You can pop out and get space ships and all nonsense like that. And I popped into one of our local stores only yesterday to try and get a geiger counter, but they're in very short supply. Did you find that, Professor Brogan?

PROF. BROGAN: Well, the demand is so great.

MR. HORNE: Tremendous demand. No, I don't think really that the atomic age is going to alter Christmas if we have our way.

MR. NEWMAN: What I had in mind was, has it changed over the past years. Now all you gentlemen, according to your biographies, have lived since the beginning of this century. And I am wondering if, since the turn of the century, have you found that some Christmas customs and practices have been dropped to the detriment of the season's enjoyment? Professor Brogan, how do you feel about that?

PROF. BROGAN: Well, I don't know that they have. As I said, the only thing I miss are the old pantomime songs which prevented me from having a career, as Malcolm Muggeridge has pointed out. And also I think, despite the fiction that it is a family festival, we more and more depend on outside entertainment. People listen a great deal to the BBC on Christmas Day and other entertainments of that kind and the children's illusions as to what they are entitled to get I think have increased by the amount of ballyhoo about Christmas. I think I was comparatively easily satisfied compared with my own children. Leaving geiger counters out of them, they have illusions of grandeur as to what the old man can afford.

MR. NEWMAN: Mr. Muggeridge, thinking back over your childhood, do you remember anything in your childhood that you enjoyed that isn't present today?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Well, I think this -- that in actual fact the religious significance of the thing has changed and diminished and I regard it as a pity, that in however a remote a way it still was considered to be the celebration of a great event in the history of the world. And I think that has tended perhaps to some extent to disappear. You find many fewer people, I think, in church on Christmas Day, which I think is a pity. But apart from that, I think the ceremony itself goes on in roughly the same sort of way. It is an occasion for families to reassemble unless like Denis they push off to Paris and leave their families in the lurch, but the others tend to reassemble and put up with one another for a couple of days, which is a very desirable thing. I wouldn't say that it had enormously changed as far as its actual sort of apparatus was concerned.

PROF. BROGAN: I think you misunderstand me, Mr. Muggeridge. My idea of going to Paris is to see the more spiritual side of Christmas. The most spiritual Christmas I ever spent was flying from San Francisco to Washington in an American plane with plastic holly, plastic holly beads, plastic wreaths and plastic food. That gives you plenty of time to contemplate the essential religious nature of Christmas which I couldn't have got, I think, with my family.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Did you have a plastic air hostess?

PROF. BROGAN: Resilient plastic.

MR. NEWMAN: Kenneth Horne, how about you? From your own experience do you recall anything that you used to enjoy that doesn't seem to be about now?

MR. HORNE: I do, seriously, agree with Malcolm to a great extent -- that the religious importance of Christmas has minimized to a great extent. I always used to go out to church on Christmas Day, indeed, I try to do that now. But coming back to radio and television again, I think a tremendous amount of people sit at home and listen to the Christmas Service there. Well, that's a very good thing to do, obviously, but it's not quite the same as going out to church and having your service there. Other customs? Well, I don't know. I think I agree with Professor Brogan. Take the importance of these presents -- we used to be awfully satisfied with something terribly small, something worth something between a penny and sixpence and now the kids of these days seem to want something colossal as you and I well know. But customs being dropped? I think they are nearly all here with us today.

MR. NEWMAN: Let's look at the other side of the coin. Are there any customs or practices that you would just as well do without?

PROF. BROGAN: Too much eating and drinking at Christmas.

MR. HORNE: Nonsense!

PROF. BROGAN: By other people anyway.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I think, developing that point a little bit, I think it has become economically somewhat oppressive. In other words, that the amount of expenditure that's required to keep it going is possibly economically unsound.

MR. HORNE: I don't think I'd alter my Christmas very much -- of course it's more expensive. We expect it to be, but I think Christmas, as we celebrate it -- the majority of us celebrate it over here -- is perfectly all right as it is. I am very happy with it.

PROF. BROGAN: If I'm not present, I'm very happy about it. Also, when I am present, if I've allowed the lesser work to be done by other people. But, as I said, I agree with Malcolm Muggeridge -- the religious aspect has disappeared. I wasn't quite facetious when I said the characteristic Christmas Carol today is not "Good King Wenceslaus" -- it's not "See a bit of Winter Snow" -- it's "White Christmas." It's a nice secular festival and since there never is a white Christmas nowadays, it's doubly phony. That is one aspect of it. And I think there is no doubt that the sales pressure to buy things at Christmas of all kinds is much greater than it was. The plugging of Christmas begins much earlier and the kind of things that are now deemed to be necessary for Christmas -- thanks to advertising -- are far more numerous. You look at what are now issued to you as possible Christmas gifts, they're far more lavish than they used to be. I'm not talking of gifts for children, but gifts to other people. I mean the habit of -- it's an American habit but it's coming in here -- of giving Christmas presents or the equivalent to people you hardly know at all, is really increasing and ought to be diminished. I diminish it by not doing it, then I'm an unsocial character.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: It is a rather historical irony, isn't it, that the Christian religion, which is based on the idea that worldly possessions are vain should find its supreme expression in a ceremony which is entirely based on acquiring wealthy possessions. That is one of those curious ironies of history and it is one, I think, which is lost on most people simply because they don't really connect this occasion with the founding of the Christian religion which brought it about.

PROF. BROGAN: You see, in France until recently you gave presents on New Year's Day. You didn't give them on Christmas Day which is a purely religious festival. And in Scotland, it's a strange thing, where people did exchange presents, those were also given on New Year's Day and that was a quite secular festival, in which you gave something for the new year. But it's only England that this Christmas present thing has completely swamped, for many people, has completely swamped the religious aspect.

MR. HORNE: Would you change the date then, on which one gave presents?

PROF. BROGAN: Yes, to the 31st of February.

MR. HORNE: On account of Scotland.

MR. NEWMAN: Professor Brogan, may I bring up this bit of information. I was told not long ago that Christmas cards, which seem to be filling the mail bags these days, originated in this country, rather than the United States. Is that correct?

PROF. BROGAN: I think that is correct. I think an English firm launched the Christmas card but it has spread all over the world now. Christmas cards are universal. I think it started in the 19th Century in England.

MR. HORNE: Was that just literally a Christmas card, as opposed to a greetings card? And didn't greetings cards, indeed, start elsewhere, even in America. I always look on America as being the home of greetings cards....

PROF. BROGAN: Yes. Mother's Day -- Father's Day....

MR. HORNE: And I hope my aunt who has a bad big toe gets well.

MR. NEWMAN: Gentlemen, before we lose the Christmas spirit, I think we had better get into our question period at the moment. May we have our first question from the audience?

QUESTIONER: Mr. Muggeridge, I have noticed when looking at Christmas cards with English table scenes on them that the Christmas pudding in this country is usually shaped like a sphere. What is the reason for this, and for the custom of putting small silver coins and other favors in the pudding?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: As regards the second point about putting small silver coins in, I believe that is a very early version of that great institution -- the give-away program. If you attract people to the Christmas pudding by indicating to them that if

they eat enough of it, they may get a silver coin. With regard to the shape, I think that's just how it came out.

PROF. BROGAN: Well, it's the right shape, obviously.

MR. HORNE: It's much easier than cooking it in the kettle and sucking it through the spout.

MR. NEWMAN: I'm told another practical reason for the shape is that the ingredients were put in a sort of a bag and dipped into the batter or what have you and it formed that shape.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I can remember by Mother making it in a cloth and if you put it in that cloth, it would inevitably take that shape.

MR. HORNE: And, what's more, those Christmas puddings stayed in the larder for a few years.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: And they got richer and richer.

MR. HORNE: They certainly did. That's absolutely serious -- they keep them in the larder for about three years and they keep extremely well.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: The only point was, Kenneth, that owing to the inflation, the coins in them got worth less and less.

MR. NEWMAN: But it is a fact that Christmas puddings were kept for two or three years?

MR. HORNE: And still are. You see them hanging around -- they keep them two or three years and they're a good deal better than when they were made.

QUESTIONER: As an American, I am somewhat perplexed by the terms used by the British in connection with Christmas celebrations. Among them are mummings, waits and wassailing. Can anyone unscramble some of these terms for me?

PROF. BROGAN: The first one simply means actor but at Christmas there used to be performed and there is still performed in a few places the medieval play, the Mummings' Play. I've heard it in Scotland in my childhood which was a regular dialogue and genuine -- of course nowadays tampered with -- medieval Christmas play. Wassail is simply "have another." It's simply a Scandinavian word meaning "down the hatch" or anything else -- the same root as "hail" and "Heil" etc. What has the other one?

QUESTIONER: Waits.

PROF. BROGAN: They go around singing and I don't know why they're called waits.

MR. HORNE: I think it's because they ring the bell and then wait for the money.

PROF. BROGAN: That's a very good explanation since they start in June now and I think they wait for Christmas.

MR. NEWMAN: It would be helpful, I think, for American listeners if you could tell us what they do before they collect the money.

PROF. BROGAN: They threaten to sing. Unless you're quick at the mark, they sing "Good King Wenceslaus" and other Christmas Carols, but if you're wise, you stop them in their tracks.

MR. NEWMAN: Professor Brogan, you gave us a few bars of a Christmas song. I wonder, were you ever a wait?

PROF. BROGAN: No, I used to go on Scotland's first footing, which was Hogmanay, on New Year's Eve but the custom there was to get a drink when you entered the house. They gave you a drink to keep you quiet.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: What did you threaten to do, Denis?

PROF. BROGAN: Sing.

MR. HORNE: I was certainly a wait in my younger days, but I think the difference between then and now is the fact that there used to be quite a party of us and we really used to rehearse these things very hard. You probably did the same, Malcolm.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Could we get Kenneth to give us a song?

MR. HORNE: No, you couldn't. But we used to rehearse pretty hard, a party of about 12 or 20 of us and we used to think that we sang quite well. And those sort of waits, provided they do sing well, are worth listening to. The trouble is these days you get a party of one coming around and ringing the bell and singing "Good King Wenceslaus" and expecting a tip of half a crown.

QUESTIONER: I would like to know something about the pantomime shows which were mentioned. What connection would "Sinbad the Sailor" or "Jack in the Beanstalk" have to do with Christmas?

PROF. BROGAN: Well, I don't know that it has any. It was customary to have pantomimes and regular plays 150 years ago, but it's only again after the creation of the modern Christmas that these comic fairy tales were associated in some vague way with Christmas. In my native city of Glasgow, you see, where they didn't celebrate Christmas, they used to have the pantomimes. The pantomimes began the end of November and ran until April but the London tradition with which they are associated with Christmas exclusively, they begin on Boxing Day, is a fairly modern thing and they're simply children's stories -- Jack in the Beanstalk and Aladdin-- Cinderella is the most popular of the lot and there is nothing like them anywhere else in the world. There is nothing like the English pantomimes.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: It's a very curious thing. I suppose really what happened was that the religious play was simply replaced by a play based on a popular story. My earliest recollections of them are always these principal boys, which are always very charming girls. My earliest amorous sentiments that I can recall were all directed toward these very enchanting girls who used to take the part of Dick Whittington, or something like that, in pantomimes.

PROF. BROGAN: And they still do. Some of those we saw as a child are still doing it.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I dare say -- they might be getting a little long in the tooth if they're still the same ones, but the question is, why is it that the tradition that the principal boy should be a girl?

MR. HORNE: I have no idea why that is, Malcolm, at all. I do happen to know that they tried changing the principal boys to boys actually and it was a ghastly failure. I have no idea why these pantomimes are associated with Christmas. All I know is that in certain parts of Great Britain, it's not directly associated with Christmas only, but in places like Birmingham and Glasgow, they start on Christmas Eve and go on to about May.

PROF. BROGAN: In Glasgow, they start long before Christmas Eve. In answer to Mr. Muggeridge's point, by having the principal boy a girl, you could show off her legs at a time when it was forbidden to do so. Why it is continued today is a mystery.

MR. HORNE: If any of the three of us went on like that -- I mean -- we've got lovely legs.

QUESTIONER: To go back to the question of religion, I'd like to ask, do any of the speakers feel that our present emphasis and traditions of custom celebrated at Christmas is overshadowed by the real purpose of the day which is to honor Christ?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I do, very strongly, as I have already said. I think that it is a great pity that the actual significance of Christmas as the great occasion and the founding of the Christian religion should have been lost and I think the tendency is to lose it more and more. And I can find many people, in this country anyway, celebrating Christmas who haven't the faintest notion of its significance in relation to Christian religion. I regard it as a pity and I wish very much that all the things like the BBC and television were used more emphatically than they are to press upon the public the fact that the real significance of this occasion is not to eat a lot or drink a lot, or even to be jovial or even to be charitable, but it is to celebrate the most momentous event in the history of the modern world.

MR. HORNE: I entirely agree with Malcolm Muggeridge. There's the old story about somebody going to buy a Christmas card and it was a very nice Bethlehem scene or something like that and they said, well -- they're even bringing religion into Christmas cards these days. It merely means that people don't realize the significance of Christmas and I agree with everything that Malcolm Muggeridge has said.

PROF. BROGAN: I think we ought to remember that the Christmas season in the old days was the 12 days from the Feast of the Nativity to the Feast of the Epiphany, with the Feast of the Circumcision in between, New Year's Day. These were all great holidays of the church but the festivity was scattered over them. Twelfth Night was

the great end of the Christmas season.

And what we've done is concentrate all the natural merriment of the winter solstice on Christmas Day whereas it was, up until the 19th Century, scattered over the 12 days of Christmas which, of course, were celebrated long before Christmas came into existence. There was the Roman Saturnalia and I think of commercial reasons mainly, Dickens plus commerce -- we've concentrated it all on Christmas Day, but it is highly irrelevant, but not highly irrelevant to New Year's Day, although to some extent I think it's irrelevant to the Epiphany.

MR. HORNE: Those 12 days that you mentioned, were they looked on as holy days or as holidays?

PROF. BROGAN: They were both. There were three great holidays in them, the three great holidays of the 25th, the 1st of January and the 6th of January but the Christmas plays and a lot of the festivities were scattered over them.

QUESTIONER: One thing that perplexes not only Americans, but also many of the British people to whom I have spoken is this. Why is the day after Christmas called Boxing Day?

MR. NEWMAN: Malcolm Muggeridge, you throw your hands up in the air. Can you explain that?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I've never understood exactly. I believe it's got some connection with a box in which various contributions were made, whether for servants or for charity and on the day after Christmas this box was opened. In other words, you got people completely sozzled and in that condition, you persuaded them to put money into a box and then the following day, when they were having their hangover, they had the humiliation of seeing what they had been inveigled into contributing to good causes the day before.

MR. HORNE: I don't think anyone knows the answer to it really. The answer that I have been told is a little bit similar to Malcolm's. I thought that Christmas Day, December 25th, was really celebrated, if that is the word, as literally a day of religion and that the Christmas presents, i.e., the boxes, were indeed opened on the day, after which was Boxing Day.

PROF. BROGAN: I think both of these may be true, they're not different. But what is significant is that no one remembers what is the real name of Boxing Day. Many people who know the carol, "Good King Wenceslaus, on the Feast of Stephen," realize the Feast of Stephen is Boxing Day, is St. Stephen's Day. But it has been totally replaced in modern times by Boxing Day -- giving presents to people, lift attendants, etc. -- people you really don't want to give anything to. St. Stephen was the first martyr and we're all martyrs now on Boxing Day.

QUESTIONER: A little while ago, one of the speakers alluded to the Yule Log and I am wondering about the custom, using it apart from the obvious and apparent one of heating the room. What other connotation has it?

PROF. BROGAN: I should like to begin by saying that heating a room is a very un-English activity and probably imported from America.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I don't pretend to be an expert on the subject, but I have every reason to believe that it has some connection with the sacrificial -- it's a pagan idea -- and it is connected with sacrifice very remotely. In other words, that you take something and burn it up as a gesture of sacrifice. It's some remote derivation of that custom.

PROF. BROGAN: The name shows it has nothing to do with Christmas. Yule is a pagan Norse word that has nothing at all to do with Christmas. Entomologically it is not a Christmas word. It may be a thing at Christmas but it has nothing to do with the religious idea of Christmas at all.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: There was a whole symbolism, wasn't there, connected with the seasons of the year in which, in the winter, you destroyed and in the spring you brought to life and the burning of the log is undoubtedly somehow, however remotely, connected with that idea of destruction which is followed at Easter by birth.

MR. HORNE: It's a very nice old Christmas habit, burning the Yule Log, anyhow. Possibly it came from Yule or Harvard.